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THE SPEECH

OF

JOHN THOMPSON BROWN,

IN THE

House of Delegates of Virginia,

ON THE

ABOLITION OF SLAVERY.

Delivered Wednesday, January 18, 1832.

RICHMOND:

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TO

APPROVED AND PASSED BY THE

SENATE

January 10, 1867

✍ It is due to Mr. Brown to state that his speech on the abolition of slavery, is published, in this form, at the particular request of a number of members of the legislature and other citizens.

Wm. Cornell, Esq.

Aug. 2, 1867.

HOUSE OF DELEGATES OF VIRGINIA.

WEDNESDAY, *January 11, 1832.*

Mr. GOODE of Mecklenburg, rose to move the following resolution :

Resolved, That the select committee raised on the subject of slaves, free negroes, and the melancholy occurrences growing out of the tragical massacre in Southampton, be discharged from the consideration of all petitions, memorials and resolutions, which have for their object, the manumission of persons held in servitude under the existing laws of this commonwealth, and that it is not expedient to legislate on the subject.

MR. RANDOLPH moved the following substitute, to be inserted after the word "Southampton :"

— "be instructed to inquire into the expediency of submitting to the vote of the qualified voters in the several towns, cities, boroughs, and counties of this commonwealth, the propriety of providing by law, that the children of all female slaves, who may be born in this state, on or after the 4th day of July, 1840, shall become the property of the commonwealth, the males at the age of twenty-one years, and females at the age of eighteen, if detained by their owners within the limits of Virginia, until they shall respectively arrive at the ages aforesaid, to be hired out until the nett sum arising therefrom, shall be sufficient to defray the expense of their removal, beyond the limits of the United States, and that said committee have leave to report by bill, or otherwise."

MONDAY, *January 16, 1832.*

MR. BRODNAX, from the committee on the coloured population, presented the following report :

The select committee, to whom was referred certain memorials, praying the passage of some law providing for the gradual abolition of slavery in the commonwealth, have,

according to order, had the same under consideration, and have come to the following resolution thereupon :

Resolved as the opinion of this committee, That it is inexpedient for the present legislature to make any legislative enactment for the abolition of slavery.

MR. PRESTON moved that the resolution reported from the committee, be amended, by striking out the word "inexpedient," and inserting the word "expedient."

WEDNESDAY, *January 18, 1832.*

On motion of Mr. BROWN of Petersburg, the report of the committee on slaves, free negroes and mulattoes, and the amendment of Mr. Preston, were taken up; when Mr. BROWN rose and addressed the house as follows :

MR. SPEAKER:—When the subject under consideration was first brought to the notice of this house, in the unostentatious form of a petition from Hanover, I felt but little apprehension about the result. I avowed, at that time, my firm conviction that no scheme of emancipation was practicable, and that none should be attempted. Yet, I was willing that the petition should be referred to a committee, and disposed of, with all becoming respect, in the ordinary manner. I believed the discussion of this question to be unavoidable, and was desirous of giving it such direction as would be best calculated to settle and to sink it for ever. I know that some intelligent gentlemen, who concurred with me in the object, were of the opinion that it would be better attained by a different course, and that the petition ought to be rejected at once, as the most effectual means of arresting the inquiry. I doubt not those gentlemen are now convinced that the agitation of this question was inevitable. If suppressed in one form, it would have arisen in another. Even the effort made by the gentleman from Mecklenburg, to arrest its progress, has been seized by the advocates of emancipation, as a favorable opportunity for the full expression of their sentiments. The very character of those sentiments, and the zeal with which they have been urged, must be sufficient to satisfy every one that they could not have been repressed. It is useless to talk of avoiding *discussion*. It will be fortunate if we can prevent *action*—immediate and decisive action—on the subject of emancipation.

I have listened to this debate, with the most anxious and

painful interest. The evils of slavery have been again and again enumerated, and set in appalling array before our imaginations. Its impoverishing effects, its immoral tendencies, and the dangers to which it exposes our lives and property, have all been the theme of eloquent and exaggerated representation. We have been told that the body politic is languishing under disease—that it is “a mass of corruption”—that there is hidden in its bosom, a pestilence more fatal than that which “wasteth at noonday.” The sufferings of the unhappy patient have drawn forth successive expressions of pity, reproach, and scornful sarcasm. It might have been expected that, with so perfect a knowledge of the malady, the physician could have recommended an effectual remedy. None has yet been proposed that commands my confidence. I have examined the various schemes which have been suggested, with unwearied attention, and with an unaffected wish to find them worthy of adoption. I have analyzed them as far as my mind is capable of doing it, and have endeavored to trace through the mists of futurity, their probable operation and consequences. It has resulted in the conviction, that they are all visionary and impracticable.

There are a few leading considerations, of paramount importance, which seem to me to constitute a standard to which we may refer every plan of emancipation, and by which we may test its merits. There are now in Virginia, about 470,000 slaves—their aggregate value is about one hundred millions of dollars—the assessed value of all the lands, houses, and lots in the commonwealth, is two hundred and six millions of dollars. Other kinds of personal property, bear but a small proportion to these three principal items. Paper currency and credits add nothing to the actual resources of the community; and it is apparent, that slaves constitute nearly one-third of the whole wealth of the state. The value of lands, houses and lots, in Virginia, east of the blue ridge, is but little more than one hundred millions of dollars. The value of the slaves in the same district, is about eighty millions, or nearly one-half of its entire wealth. These slaves constitute the nett proceeds of the labour of our ancestors and ourselves, from the foundation of the colony at James Town, to the present moment. We found the soil where it is—it was no acquisition of ours—we cultivated it, and it has yielded us one hundred millions of dollars, which have been gradually invested in slaves. Many think it a bad investment—an unprofitable investment—an *unrighteous* investment. But whether it be for good or for evil, the investment is made. It now forms our capital stock. It is the sum total of the hard earnings of successive generations, during the long and toilsome

lapse of more than two hundred years. We derive our subsistence from the labour of our slaves, precisely in the same manner that we would live on the interest of our money if the one hundred millions had been invested in bank stock. From the annual products of their labour, we obtain the necessities of life, and have a surplus of more than four millions for exportation. Take from us these slaves without compensation, and what have we left? Our land, 'tis true—but even that would be depreciated to a great and incalculable extent. By depriving us of labourers, and leaving us destitute of the means of procuring others, you throw out of cultivation a proportionate part of the soil—lessen the demand for it, and reduce its price. In short, sir, whether the emancipation and removal of our slaves be effected in one year, or in fifty years, whenever the work shall have been accomplished, you will have reduced us to beggary and want. A few instances of individual bankruptcy may pass unnoticed, but it is a fearful thing to drag down a whole community from affluence and ease, to abject poverty. If the people of Virginia are prepared to make this sacrifice, be it so; the question, in that event, is at an end. I presume, however, that they have not yet been made sensible of the expediency or necessity of surrendering one hundred millions worth of property, and voluntarily embracing pauperism. Whenever, therefore, a scheme of emancipation is presented, my first inquiry is, whether it admits the right of the slave owner to an adequate compensation for his property; and if so, whence is the one hundred millions, required for the purchase of our slaves, and the additional fifteen millions necessary for the transportation, to be procured? If, on the contrary, the scheme does not contemplate a compensation for slaves to be emancipated, I am prepared, at once, to decide that it is impracticable and ruinous—because, the people of Virginia cannot afford to lose one hundred and fifteen millions of dollars.

Keeping these cardinal considerations in view, let us examine more closely, the proposition of the gentleman from Albemarle, (Mr. Randolph) which provides, in substance, that the children of slaves, which may be born after the year 1840, shall be free at a certain period—the males at the age of 21, and the females at the age of 18—be hired out by the commonwealth, for a number of years, and eventually transported to Africa, or elsewhere. No compensation is contemplated by this plan; but some gentlemen, who are scrupulous about taking this property without paying for it, are, nevertheless, reconciled to this scheme, because it is not to affect slaves now in existence, but only their future increase. It is true that it will not take from any man the slaves now in his

possession, but it will lessen their value. Those slaves afford a certain annual income, and the capital which yields it is kept unimpaired, and is even augmented by the ordinary, natural increase of this population. When you determine that the owners shall not be entitled to this increase, you rob their property of one of those inherent qualities which constitutes the chief element of its value—the capacity to reproduce and perpetuate itself. At the end of some indefinite period, say eighty years, the whole of the slaves now in existence, will have ceased to exist, and the only residuum in the hands of the owners will be the profits of their labour; accrued during the interval. On the other hand, allow their owners the benefit of their increase, and at the expiration of the eighty years they will not only have received an equal amount of profit, but the capital stock, which generates the profit, will be undiminished. And not only so, but at the usual ratio of increase, it will be doubled, and be actually worth two hundred millions of dollars. The present value of any kind of property, depends on the extent to which it can be augmented within a given period. Can there be a doubt as to which is worth most at this time—property which in the lapse of eighty years, is to perish and be extinct—or property which, during the same period, is to be increased two-fold—each, in the interval, yielding the same profit? Pass this law, and all will be anxious to sell out their interest in property which yields only an ordinary profit, while the capital is gradually sinking, in order to invest it in that which yields an equal profit, while the capital is secure. All will prefer hiring slaves—none will wish to own them. Their price, in the aggregate, will sink to a point at which it will be equal only to the value of an annuity calculated on the probable duration of their lives, and the yearly profits of their labour. We have now an interest in our slaves, analogous to a *fee-simple* estate in lands; but by the proposed law, this perpetuity will be converted into an usufructuary interest, for a term of about eighty years. I repeat it, sir, can it be doubted which is worth most at this time?

Independent of the effect of this scheme on the value of slaves now in existence, the destiny of their increase, or the after-born children, involves prospectively, an interest amounting, in the course of eighty years, to two hundred millions of dollars. Is it not natural, and reasonable, that the slaveholder should feel the deepest solicitude about the disposal of so immense an interest?

But, sir, it was scarcely necessary to enter thus far into an examination of the mode in which this plan is to operate. It is enough to look at its ultimate consequences. It proposes

no compensation to the owner of slaves. It contemplates a period, at which, through the instrumentality of its provisions, the whole of our slaves will have been swept from our possession. No matter when this object may be attained, whether in eighty or a hundred years—no matter what particular aspects the work may assume, in the course of its execution—whenever the consummation shall be effected, the whole of our available property will have vanished without an equivalent, leaving our country desolate and our people bankrupt.

I have, thus far, confined my remarks to the financial character of this scheme. There are other considerations connected with it of a different nature and well deserving attention. It is said that our slaves are disaffected and rebellious—that our lives are in peril, and that some immediate precautions are necessary to insure the public safety. The danger is represented as being imminent, and we are urged to act at once, even during the present session of the general assembly. And yet the favorite measure offered for our adoption, is not to have any visible effect for a quarter of a century. We are, by this act, to make a public confession of our fears—to acknowledge that the sense of security is gone—to announce to the slave, that the principles of natural justice entitle him to freedom—that reasons of expediency demand it, and he shall be free—but, yet in the face of these fatal admissions, not a solitary slave is to be liberated from bondage, or sent out of the commonwealth for nearly thirty years. Sir, the ingenuity of man, if exerted for the purpose, could not devise a more efficient mode of producing discontent among our slaves, and thus endangering the peace of the community.

There is another feature of this plan which tends to similar consequences. There are born, annually, of this population, about twenty thousand children. Those which may be born before the year 1840, are to be slaves—those which may be born, after that period, are to be free at a certain age. These two classes will be reared together—they will labor together and commune together. It cannot escape the observation of him who is doomed to servitude, that although of the same color and born of the same parents, a far different destiny awaits his more fortunate brother. In reflecting on the causes of this distinction, he will find no satisfactory reason for it, in the circumstance of the one having come into being a few months before the other. As his thoughts again and again revert to the subject, he will begin to regard himself as the victim of injustice. His fancy will exaggerate the blessings of liberty and the miseries of his own lot. Cheerfulness and contentment will flee from his bosom, and the most harmless and happy creature that lives on earth,

will be transformed into a dark, designing and desperate rebel. In ancient history, there is an apt illustration of this fearful tendency of the human passions. Cain and Abel, the children of our first parents, built their altars side by side, and worshipped their Creator together. Abel's offering burnt freely and brightly, and the fumes of his incense rose high towards heaven. Not so with Cain's. No flame or fragrance issued from his sacrifice in token of its acceptance. The demon at once took possession of his soul. Envy, hatred and despair, urged him to madness, and then was shed by a brother's hand, the first blood that ever stained the earth. Let us not expose his "children in misfortune," who bear, like him, on their persons, the mark of divine displeasure, to the same trial which overwhelmed with ruin, their guilty ancestor.

Such are some of the objections that would apply to the scheme of the gentleman from Albemarle, even if the owners of slaves were disposed to submit to the loss resulting from it, and to co-operate in its execution. But we have been told by gentlemen, whose opinions are worthy of entire confidence, that the slave holder will insist on his legal rights, and call upon the laws of the country, to protect him in the enjoyment of his property. By what authority shall it be taken from him, without compensation? Strange doctrines have been advanced on this subject. We have been gravely told that although the slaves now in existence belong to their owners, and cannot be taken from them, yet the unborn children of those slaves are not property, and may be emancipated or confiscated to the state, without injustice, because they are not now in being, and therefore cannot belong to any one. Is it necessary, sir, to enter into an argument before this intelligent body to show the utter fallacy of this position, and that an individual may acquire in any future, incorporeal interest, to issue from property, already belonging to him, as valid a right as he has to the property itself? It would be just as useless as to attempt to prove that a man has a present and perfect right to the interest which is to accrue from his money during the ensuing year. These gentlemen contend that the right to the future children of slaves, cannot vest, until they shall have been born, and that in the meantime, the act for their emancipation intercepts the right, and prevents it from ever vesting. I presume it will be admitted, that the act of emancipation cannot take effect until there is something for it to operate upon. If you cannot own a child until born, you cannot emancipate a child unborn. At the instant of birth, the right of property vests. The act divesting it, cannot be antecedent in its application. It must

be contemporaneous or subsequent, and in either case, is conflicting and illegal in its operation. Let us extend this doctrine a little farther, and see to what absurd consequences it leads. The wages of your labor, or the produce of your lands, during the coming year, are not yet in your possession, and therefore, you have not a valid right to them. The legislature passes a law directing that they shall be paid into the public treasury, as soon as they accrue. What cause have you to complain? According to the principles assumed here, these wages, and the fruits of your soil, are not yours. They cannot be yours, until they shall have actually come into your possession. But in the meantime, the law interposes, and places them to the credit of the commonwealth. You are not aggrieved, because no *vested right* is infringed! Sir, these subtle and refined distinctions, are beneath the dignity of the subject under discussion. I should not have noticed them, but for an absorbing desire to leave nothing untouched, that might obscure the truth, and I cannot dismiss them, with a more appropriate argument than a "*reductio ad absurdum*."

And why should gentlemen waste their ingenuity and eloquence in attempting to prove that the owners of slaves are not entitled to their *increase*, when they are prepared to assail the right to *slaves* themselves, whether born or unborn. The gentleman from Kenhawa, for the purpose of showing that slaves are not property, upon the general principles of law and justice, has referred to the celebrated decision in England, in the case of Somerset, where it was held, in the language of Curran, that "the moment a slave treads on British soil, his shackles fall off, and he stands regenerated and disenthralled, by the redeeming spirit of universal emancipation." I shall say nothing of the merits of this proud boast, nor how far its consistency is preserved throughout the institutions of that country. But surely it is not seriously intended to quote as authority here, the decision of an English court, made under a law totally different from that which exists in Virginia. British opinions on this subject are, moreover, the last that should be arrayed against us. They sold us these slaves—they assumed a vender's responsibility, and it is not for them to question the validity of our title.

The gentleman from Montgomery contends, as I understand him, that slaves are property by the statute alone—that this statute was passed by the ordinary legislature, and may be repealed by the same authority—that there is nothing in the constitution which secures the right of property in a slave. He admits that those clauses in the constitution which provide that "property shall not be taken without due process of law," and "private property shall not be taken for public

uses without just compensation," do afford protection to some kinds of property, but not to slave property. The admission is fatal to his argument, for it is impossible to find any grounds of distinction. The constitution uses the general term "property," and whatever comes under that denomination, is equally protected. To ascertain what is "property," we must refer to the laws which define it. The statute declaring slaves to be "property," was in force at the adoption of the constitution, and is to be regarded as supplementary and explanatory of the provision in that instrument. It is not necessary to show that the right of property in slaves, is founded in nature. No one, I presume, would contend for that. It is a right purely conventional, and derived from the assent and agreement of those who are united with us by compact, in the same political family. The right to our lands is not a natural one. The earth is the common property of all, and the privilege of appropriating a portion of its surface to our individual use, is derived from the social compact, and not from nature. Yet, the right to hold slaves and the right to appropriate lands, are recognised by our laws, and equally guaranteed by the constitution. The gentleman from Brunswick very properly referred to the constitution of the United States, which contains the same clause that is found in our state constitution, as affording an additional guard to slave property. To give effect to that instrument in any particular state, it is only necessary to ascertain what is property by the laws of that state. What is property in one state, may not be so in another. It is enough that in Virginia slaves are property. That being admitted, the constitution of the United States is to be considered as recognising and guaranteeing them as such. The gentleman from Berkeley, however, protests against the introduction of the constitution of the United States. He says he is proud of belonging to a certain party, the name of which it is unnecessary to repeat. But it is a party which has always been ready to appeal to that constitution whenever it was thought expedient to increase the powers of the general government, or to strip the states of their rights. Now, however, when this constitution is invoked in defence of the right of property in slaves, the gentleman seems filled with a holy horror, and declares it is purely a state concern, and he would not, for the world, that the federal constitution should be brought to bear on so delicate a question.

The gentleman from Berkeley has boundless resources, and I dare say it is immaterial with him, whether by the law or the constitution, slaves are property, or not. Let them be what they may, he entertains another principle, which places

them all entirely at his mercy. He says they are dangerous to the public safety; and may, therefore, be "abated as a nuisance." The idea of destroying some noxious object that engenders pestilence, and is obviously injurious to the life and property in its immediate vicinity, is familiar to us all. But did any one ever before conceive the thought of abating as a "nuisance" a whole population, constituting an organic part of the frame and character of the body politic? The artillery of the law, I apprehend, sir, is too light for the prostration of so gigantic and so undefinable an object. There are now, he says, but few slaves among the people he represents, but the evil is approaching them, and must be arrested. He is not satisfied with the erection of a barrier around his borders, but claims the right to come down into the infected district, and to eradicate the evil according to his own views of expediency, at the expense of the slave holder, in order to insure the welfare of a neighboring community. What principle is it, sir, that lies disguised under this fair exterior? It is the doctrine of the holy alliance—the very basis on which they have consolidated their power, and through the operation of which, the nations of Europe lie bleeding and defenceless at their feet. They too, claim the privilege of regulating the affairs of contiguous states, with a view to the welfare of their own subjects. Constituting themselves the judges of what is or is not an evil, as well as of the measure and mode of redress, they never need a pretext for interfering when their interests or their passions urge them onward. It is to maintain the independence of neighboring nations, that they parcel out their territories among themselves; and the better to preserve perpetual peace, that they march their armies over the face of Europe. From a pretended solicitude for the repose of nations, they have denounced the revolution of France as a curse—they have crushed the mangled remains of Poland, and under the abused pretence of humanity and necessity, they plant their desolating feet on every soil that bears a germ of liberty. Sir, this is a dangerous rule of action, and will be fatal to our peace whenever it shall be attempted. Self-preservation is the law of nature, and preventive measures are sometimes necessary. But the danger must not be anticipated—it must not be doubtful—it must be urgent, imminent, inevitable.

The gentleman from Berkeley has warned us, emphatically, that the west is firm and united in favor of emancipation. Sir, I do not presume to speak the sentiments of that people. There is a small portion of them to whom I lately bore an intimate political relation, and to whom I shall ever be bound by the strongest ties of gratitude and affection. The liberal

opinions already expressed by one of their representatives on this floor, is in exact accordance with the feelings I should have ascribed to his constituents on such a subject. This is, to me, a cheering augury; and I should not be surprised if the gentleman from Berkeley should, eventually, find himself unsupported in the ground he has assumed. I feel well assured that he will be alone as to the reasons which govern his course. The west may vote for emancipation, but not because they consider slaves as not property, or as property held at the pleasure of the legislature. The late convention, and the events that led to it, are fresh in the recollection of all. It is now a matter of history, that the strong argument urged by the east against that measure was, that it endangered the security of slave property. The west disclaimed again and again, on every fit occasion, all intention of disturbing that subject. In the humble part which it was my lot to act in those scenes, I disavowed on this floor, any such object, and with the concurrence of those who then acted with me, offered a specific guarantee for slave property, in order to quiet the apprehensions of the east. The object of the west was an equal representation on the basis of white population, which I thought then, and still think, the only true, republican principle of representation. They never dreamed then, of molesting the slave holder in the enjoyment of his property. It is true, their main purposes were not accomplished by the convention, and they may justly complain of being denied an equal representation on the true basis. But will they do injustice to others, because they are wronged themselves? Can they retract the sentiments and feelings so often avowed on the subject of slaves?

Sir, I have the utmost confidence in the course which will be pursued on this subject by western gentlemen. So far as they conceive the interests of their constituents to be concerned, they will, of course, pursue the dictates of their own judgment. But so far as they can persuade themselves that it is a matter, chiefly and peculiarly affecting eastern Virginia, they will be governed by a generous and magnanimous policy. And sir, notwithstanding all that has been said to excite their apprehensions, do not the people of the west, perceive, in the peculiarities of their situation, satisfactory reasons for believing that slavery never will exist to any objectionable extent amongst them? The people of the east are planters. Slaves are the most suitable labourers for them. Any number of them may work to advantage together. Their labours are of a kind which white men are rarely found willing to engage in. The people of the west, on the other hand, are farmers and graziers. They need comparatively, but few labourers, and those only for certain periods of the year. White men can always be found for light and agreea-

ble employments. The husbandman would prefer hiring to owning a man—because, upon a calculation of interest, he would rather pay a labourer for his work and let him go his way, than be burdened with his support throughout the year; whether wanting or not—and from the cradle to the grave. A few slaves there may be, in the west, to fill the menial, domestic offices, but they will never become the labourers of that region. Look over the face of the union, and see the abundant evidence of this fact. Slavery has disappeared from the eastern and middle states, and is to be found only where planting is the characteristic occupation. This, sir, is merely because slaves ceased to be profitable there. It was from a principle of economy, and not from a sentiment of morality or religion. That such were not the motives of our northern brethren, is proved by the fact, which I believe, is notorious, that they sent off many of their slaves to a southern market, in order to avoid the operation of their emancipation laws. A more exact parallel may be found in the Carolinas—the interior districts of which, bear some resemblance to western Virginia. On the seaboard of those states, slaves bear a much greater proportion to the whites than here. In the mountainous districts, there are, comparatively, few. That dark wave which haunts the fancy of the gentleman from Kenhawa, has there been rolling for centuries, against mountains not so lofty as ours, and yet it has only cast a little spray beyond. Let that gentleman dismiss his apprehensions. The foot of the negro delights not in the dew of the mountain grass. He is the child of the sandy desert. The burning sun gives him life and vigour, and his step is most joyous on the arid plain. Let the people of the west, be well assured, that in the peculiarities of their climate, their habits, feelings and pursuits—in the fixed and unalterable laws of nature—they have a more effectual *cordon sanitaire* than any with which legislative art can environ them.

But to return from this digression—for as such, I consider it—to the proposition of the gentleman from Albemarle. Some credit is claimed for it on the ground of its being the plan of Mr. Jefferson. Sir, no man holds in greater respect than I do, the character and services of Mr. Jefferson. His memory needs no eulogy from me. The author of the declaration of independence, and the acknowledged champion of democracy—the patron of science—the founder of our laws, and identified with all the important measures which have elevated his country to the summit of greatness, his fame is beyond the reach of cavil or detraction; and when impartial history shall have done her office, and the moss of ages shall have gathered on his grave, posterity will concur in the

suffrage which pronounces him the ablest *statesman*, of the purest republic upon earth. Admitting this to be the plan of this great man, and according to it all the respect it deserves on that account, let me tell you, sir, that the most vain and unprofitable of all human efforts, is that of resuming the unfinished labours of the "mighty dead." The fragments of their thoughts are not only valueless but dangerous. The same genius which conceived them is necessary to fill up their details and to select the fit occasion for applying them. When Hercules died, there was no man left to lift his club. That Mr. Jefferson indulged the hope, that slavery might sooner or later cease to exist amongst us, it is impossible to doubt. He loved his country enthusiastically, and having assisted in bringing all her institutions to the utmost attainable point of excellence, he regretted that there should remain what the most fastidious might consider a blemish on the goodly edifice. It was the day dream of the patriot and the philanthropist. Who of us, has not, at times, been beguiled into the same lovely anticipation? And yet who can look around on things as they are, and not awake to the reality that it is "all but a dream?" Had Mr. Jefferson thought emancipation practicable, why did he never attempt its accomplishment? He spent a long and glorious life in the service of his country, and much of it, in her legislative councils—at a time, too, when this "monster" was yet in its infancy. Look through your statute books and records and see them filled with the monuments of his genius and industry. When did he relax in his efforts to promote the welfare of his country? When did he grow weary in devising measures for her honour and happiness? And when, let me add—did his daring spirit shrink from the execution of what his judgment approved? Yet, Mr. Jefferson lived and died, without proposing emancipation. And is it for us to buckle his manly armour on our stripling limbs, and attempt a work which he would never venture to embark in? With just as much modesty and wisdom, might we aspire to mount the chariot of the sun, and, with feeble hand and giddy head, to guide his horses along the heavens. But after all, this is not the plan of Mr. Jefferson. He always recognised the right of property in slaves, and admitted that they must be purchased from their owners. [See letter to Jared Sparks.] He evidently hoped that at some distant day, the increased resources of the country, aided by the proceeds of the public lands, might supply the means of compensation.

I have dwelt thus long on the proposition of the gentleman from Albemarle, because I am confident in the belief, that it is—and will continue to be—the favorite measure of the abo-

litionists. It is recommended to them by the fact, that it dispenses with the troublesome necessity of providing means for the purchase of slaves; and it has, moreover, gained currency and popularity from its success in Pennsylvania, although the circumstances under which the experiment was made there, were totally different from these which exist here. Slaves constituted but an inconsiderable share of the wealth of that state—a still smaller proportion of her population—and the loss was still further alleviated by the expedient of selling slaves to the southern states, before the act of emancipation took effect on them.

Various schemes of emancipation, allowing a fair compensation to the slave holder, have been suggested in the course of this debate. The gentleman from Kenhawa proposes to raise the money for purchasing the slaves by taxation, and to apply it in the most economical and effectual manner, according to certain rules which he prescribes, to the removal, in the first instance, of slaves of certain ages and sexes. He avows it as his belief, that the people will pay the tax cheerfully. Sir, the people may pay this tax—they may pay it willingly—they may respond to the demand again and again—to the twentieth time—as long as they are able to pay. But at last, sir, they will be able to pay no longer. To purchase and remove the slaves now in existence, you must tax them according to previous estimates, to the amount of \$115,000,000. How far will you have advanced towards this object, before their means will be exhausted and their pockets empty? But suppose your efforts are confined to the purchase and removal of the annual increase of the slave population? That increase is about 4,800 slaves, which at \$200 each, are worth \$960,000. The cost of their removal at \$36 each, the estimate of the colonization society, is about \$172,000—amounting in all to \$1,132,000 per annum. Can the commonwealth bear even this burden, which must from its nature be perpetual, inasmuch as the necessity which calls for it will continue to exist? The present annual amount of taxes on lands, slaves and other property is less than \$300,000. The whole annual expenses of the government are less than \$450,000. What will be the consequences of an additional weight of more than a million a year? But, sir, whether the whole or a part are to be purchased and removed, does it escape the sagacity of the gentleman from Kenhawa, that those who are mainly to pay these taxes are the very persons whose slaves are to be purchased? The money is levied in the shape of taxation to-day, and the expenses of collection being deducted, the balance is to be returned to them to-morrow in payment for their slaves. It would be better to surrender

their property at once, and thus save the fees and commissions of the tax gatherer.

We are told by other gentlemen, that the proceeds of the public lands will afford an ample fund, and that the general government will cheerfully dedicate them to the purpose. I shall not question the right of that government to make an *absolute* gift of those proceeds to the states. But, to distribute them *upon condition* that they be applied to a specified object is the same thing in effect as to make a direct appropriation to that object, the authority for which may well be doubted. Admitting, however, that the general government has the power and the will to devote these funds to the purchase and removal of slaves, what will be accomplished by it? The annual proceeds of the sale of these lands, has not averaged two millions of dollars. I will assume, however, as the annual average, the maximum of three millions of dollars. Virginia's share of this sum, distributed according to the ratio of representation, is nearly one-eleventh, or about \$270,000 per annum. And will this fund supply \$115,000;000 for the purchase and removal of all your slaves? or will it even furnish annually, \$1,130,000—the sum required to buy and carry away the annual increase of your slaves? Let us not flatter ourselves with the belief that Virginia will receive more than her proportionate part of that fund. Justice, she may obtain at the hands of the general government, but beyond that, she has nothing to expect. No other rule of distribution will be adopted, unless, perhaps, it be to give up the lands or their proceeds, to the slave holding states exclusively. It cannot for a moment be supposed that Virginia is to be the sole object of national bounty. What then would be the aspect of the case? There are in the United States, according to the last census, 2,010,000 slaves—to purchase and remove which, at the rates before assumed, would require rather more than \$474,000,000. The annual increase in the United States, is about 47,000, the purchase and removal of which, alone, would require upwards of \$11,000,000 annually. The fund at our disposal, applicable to this purpose, would be \$3,000,000 per annum. And it is worthy of consideration, that this yearly produce of the public lands, will not be augmented. On the contrary, as you withdraw slave labor from the east, you create an opening for white men, which will check emigration to the west—lessen the demand for the public lands, and thus diminish the fund upon which the whole operation depends.

We are assured, however, that although the public lands may be insufficient, the coffers of the general government will be thrown open to us—and, I presume, in like manner, to the

other slave-holding states. I know that we are accustomed to consider the resources of that government as inexhaustible, and indeed they seem so, when compared to the diminutive resources of our own commonwealth. But will the common treasury of this great confederacy, be able to furnish \$474,000,000 for the extinction of slavery—or can it afford, even, \$11,000,000 annually for keeping down the increase? Supposing the surplus revenue of the general government to be ample, it must be obtained through the medium of high duties on imports, and it is a well known fact, that the burden would rest chiefly on the southern states. It would be nothing more or less, than drawing from the pockets of the slave holders, by indirect taxation, the money with which their slaves were eventually to be purchased. It would be better economy to abandon them at once, without compensation, than to go through the troublesome and expensive ceremony of furnishing the means to have them bought. But whatever may be the resources of the federal government, or howsoever obtained, are they at the command of the southern states? It is true, the legislatures of several states, in response to the resolutions of Rufus King, have declared their willingness to dedicate the public lands and other resources, to the extinction of slavery. There is no security that they will fulfil this promise, and when Virginia shall appear at the bar of congress, supplicating assistance, as I presume she must, before she will receive it, is it entirely certain that she will not be refused! Sir, I confess myself incredulous on that subject. The southern states have heretofore maintained that slavery within their respective limits, is their own peculiar domestic concern. They have promptly repelled every effort on the part of the federal government, or their sister states, to interfere with the subject. The firmness and consistency of their conduct, sustained by a constitutional guarantee that admits of no doubtful construction, has kept intrusion at a distance. Should Virginia now come down from this moral eminence—this impregnable stand; (and let me tell you, that when she once abandons it, she can never regain it)—and invite the congress of the United States to take charge of her slaves, how will she be treated? Congress will doubtless, be willing to abolish slavery, if it were for no other purpose than to lessen the political weight of the south. The operation would take from Virginia more than five members, and from the slave holding states, in the aggregate, twenty-four members, or one-fourth part of their representation. But by what means, and upon what terms, will the work be conducted? Sir, when the general government shall have obtained the control of this subject, and the slave holding states lie defenceless at her feet, you

will hear no more of the *purchase* and removal of slaves. You will then be told that they are persons and not things—that they are not property—or if property, that they are dangerous and the public safety requires their seizure and removal. The bill of rights will be quoted to prove that they are men and entitled to their freedom. They will be removed and slavery will be extinguished, but it will be without compensation, and at your expense. If the general government has a surplus treasure to bestow on the states—be it so—Virginia will know to what purposes to apply her portion. But if that gift is to be subject to a condition, which gives to the congress of the United States a virtual control over this delicate question, let the offer be promptly and unhesitatingly rejected.

I have now examined all the schemes of emancipation which have been presented in the course of this debate; I have said nothing of the removal of people of color who are now free. That is a measure wholly independent of the one under consideration. It cannot with propriety be blended with it. Its very object is adverse, being intended as a means of enabling the slave owner to retain his property in safety and tranquillity. Neither is it necessary to allude to voluntary manumission. The owner of a slave has ample power to send him beyond the limits of the state and there to sell him or liberate him. No legislative authority is required for that purpose. Even if manumission within the state be permitted, and the government assume the responsibility of removal, it is still merely a provision respecting *negroes already free*. The true question which we are now considering is, whether the whole or a part of our *slaves*, shall, by the coercive operation of law, be removed beyond our limits, either with or without compensation to their owners. And on this question, it is my clear and settled conviction, founded on the reasons already expressed, that there is no practicable mode of getting rid of our slaves or even of removing the annual increase.

Yes, sir, there is one mode—and only one. It has been pointed out by the gentleman from Halifax, (Mr. Bruce). We can flee from the country and leave them in possession of our goods and habitations. We may abandon our homes—the land of our birth—the graves of our fathers, and wander with our families, wretched and destitute, through the wilds of the west, in pursuit of some spot to lay our weary bones upon. And, sir, if abolitionists and ill-judging philanthropists will persevere in agitating this question, the time is not distant when the harrassed slave holder may find it a relief to embrace even this alternative.

Having arrived at the conclusion that emancipation is im-

practicable, it would seem superfluous to pursue the subject further. Our deliberations, I humbly conceive, ought never to have been carried beyond this point. Of what avail is it to demonstrate that slavery is an evil, unless it can be shown that it is possible to get rid of it? This discussion, however, has taken a much wider range. Gentlemen have congratulated themselves that the seal of secrecy is at last broken, that the prudent example set by our ancestors, of deliberating with closed doors, has been disregarded, and that they are at liberty, not only to express their opinions, but to send them forth to the world. They have availed themselves fully of the opportunity. The subject has been considered in all its aspects and relations. The right of the master to his slave—the immorality and injustice of slavery—the miseries it inflicts on the unhappy negro—its pernicious effects on the character, interests and safety of the white man, have all been descanted on, with unmeasured freedom and severity. I have been utterly astonished, sir, at the character this debate has assumed. The gentleman from Kenhawa, a few weeks since, in calling for the publication of a certain correspondence, informed us that he should not interfere in this matter.

[Mr. Summers rose to explain—He had stated on the occasion alluded to, that he had no plan to propose—that he should wait for the propositions of others; and that, meanwhile, all the information that could be obtained, was desirable.]

Mr. BROWN resumed—I did not intend to impute to that gentleman any want of candour. I was under the impression (erroneously, however, as I am now satisfied,) that he had declared himself disinterested on this subject, and being under that impression, I was surprised, when he said, in his eloquent speech of yesterday, that he would glory in coming down to lead forth the oppressed from the land of bondage, even through the waves of the Red sea. His explanation is satisfactory to me, and doubtless so to the house. No matter then, by what means this discussion may have been produced, it is too late now to change its character. The charge has been made and the issue is joined. If any thing can be said in defence of slavery, the occasion certainly demands it.

And is there, then, no apology for slavery? Is it a sin of so deep a die that none dare vindicate it? For my own part sir, I am not the advocate of slavery in the abstract, and if the question were upon introducing it, I should be the very last to agree to it; but I am yet to be convinced, that slavery as it exists in Virginia, is either criminal or immoral. It was cast upon us by the act of others. It was one of the attendant circumstances under which we were ushered into life.

It was a condition charged on the tenure of our existence. It is our lot, our destiny—and whether, in truth, it be right or wrong—whether it be a blessing or a curse, the moment has never yet been, when it was possible for us to free ourselves from it. This is enough to satisfy my conscience. The powers of man are limited—impossibilities are not expected of him, nor will he be required to sacrifice his happiness—the primary object of his existence—in the vain attempt to change the face of human affairs. “Who does the best that circumstance allows, does well—acts nobly—angels could no more.”

We are told, that it was the fault of our ancestors, if not our own—that the golden bait glittered on our shores and attracted from afar the mercenary slave trader. Let us tread lightly, sir, on the ashes of the dead. Our forefathers were a race of noble and virtuous men. “Take them for all in all, we ne’er shall look upon their like again.” Their memory is dear to us, and should not be tarnished, unjustly. They did not originate the slave trade. The venerable bishop of Chiapa, regarding the negroes as an inferior race—from mistaken motives of philanthropy—recommended their introduction into South America, for the purpose of relieving the Indians from the burden of working the mines. Some roving speculator, disappointed in a market elsewhere, brought his wretched cargo to our coast. The tempter came, uninvited, as he did into Eden, and human frailty yielded to his seductions. Even then, it was INDIVIDUAL cupidity alone that generated the evil. The government, resting on the basis of PUBLIC OPINION, was always opposed to it. Twenty-three statutes were passed by the House of Burgesses, to prevent the introduction of slaves into Virginia, and all were negatived by the British King. It is to this inhuman use of his prerogative, that indignant allusion is made in the declaration of independence. As soon as the revolution began, Virginia prohibited the slave trade, and it was one of the first acts of her independence, to make it punishable with death. When the federal constitution was presented to Virginia for adoption, it was objected to, on the ground that it did not prohibit the states, immediately, from allowing the further importation of slaves—a traffic which was indignantly and eloquently denounced by the ablest members of the convention. When Virginia gave to the union, that princely domain, the northwestern territory, which now constitutes the states of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, she annexed the condition, that slavery should never exist within its limits. The celebrated ordinance of 1786 contained the terms of the grant—the regulations for the future government of the territory, and the perpetual interdiction of slavery. It was drawn by Mr. Jeffer-

son, and passed by the vote of Virginia, Georgia and the two Carolinas, together with four other States,—any two of which, by voting in the negative, might have caused its rejection.

This brief reference to the history of slavery, proves that it was forced upon us by a train of events that could not be controlled. Every effort was made to suppress it, and when that was no longer possible, effectual measures were taken to prevent its propagation elsewhere. What was brought upon us without our agency, and tolerated at first, from unavoidable necessity, has now become essential to our happiness, and is not inconsistent with that of the slave himself. In what code of ethics, human or divine, is it written that slavery is an offence of so odious a character that no circumstances can palliate it—no necessity excuse it? Whence is derived the authority for saying that it is a sin, so very foul and monstrous, that Virginia is bound to pluck it from her bosom, though her life's blood should gush after it? Sir, there are pure and holy men who have looked upon it without abhorrence. Even that Apostle, from whose mind—as we are told by the gentleman from Rockbridge,—the last shadows of sin and error were chased away by light from heaven, did not condemn slavery. So far from it, St. Paul sent home to his master Philemon, (a minister of the gospel!) a runaway slave whom he met with at Rome, with a letter asking forgiveness for the fugitive, and apologizing for having temporarily taken him into his service. The Saviour of mankind did not condemn it. He appeared in a province of the Roman Empire, which was filled with slaves. Their number was estimated at forty millions, and their condition abject and wretched in the extreme. The master exercised, without restraint, the power of life and death over the slave, and exposed him, at pleasure, to the scourge, the crucifix and the sword of the gladiator. The slave was responsible with his own life for that of his master, and was put to death if the master were murdered, no matter by whom. Christ saw these slaves—their numbers and their wretchedness. Nothing escaped his all-pervading eye. He came into the world to reprove sin, and he did reprove it, in all the diversified forms in which it appeared before him. Yet he rebuked not slavery. On the contrary, he gave it his implied approbation by exhorting masters to be kind to their servants—and enjoining it on servants to be faithful and obedient to their masters. Shall we, sir, affect a morality more pure and exalted than that of the primitive christians, or even the blessed author of our faith? Slavery prevails over all the world,—from the Ganges to the Nile—from Indus to the Pole. The principle exists every where, and is virtually felt even among those who are called

free. Where is the community in which there are not individuals who, in dragging out a toilsome and wretched existence, exposed to "the rich man's scorn—the proud man's contumely," do not see and feel that this world was made for others? And who can say that this partial evil, is not conducive to the universal good, or, in some manner, subservient to the beneficent purposes of an all-wise Providence? Nations are stricken down under the rod of affliction, and bowed low, for centuries, at the footstool of oppression; but let it "justify the ways of God to man," that in the endless vicissitudes of human affairs, the balance may, at last, be redressed, and retributive justice done to all. We, ourselves, are the slaves of circumstances, and if, in submitting to this universal order of social being, we do sin, let us repose with humble confidence in the hope, that, when arraigned at the bar of posterity—so much dreaded by the gentleman from Hanover—or at the throne of Heaven, the palliation we can plead—aided by that merciful intercession that will not be denied us, may secure our pardon and forgiveness.

Again, sir; I contend that the happiness of the slave does not call for his emancipation. His condition is better than that of four-fifths of the human family. He enjoys far more of the comforts of life, than the peasantry of many of the nations in Europe. The Russian or Polish serf, for instance, is a mere appendage to the soil—the victim of passion or arbitrary transfer, and kept in submission by being plunged in the darkest tide of ignorance and superstition. Lands are assigned him, and the proceeds of his labour are called his own, but the whole, beyond a miserable subsistence, are absorbed in the payment of rents and dues. He accumulates nothing; and if the seasons prove unpropitious, he is exposed to all the horrors of famine. When worn out with toil and bowed down with age, there is no one from whom he can demand a support. He is not called a slave; but in what respect is his lot more desirable? The slave also amasses nothing, but whatever betides, he is sure of a subsistence. He is independent of accident or the elements. If his owner becomes too poor to feed and clothe him, he is sure to sell him to one who is able. His life is under the protection of the law. When disabled by age or disease, he is secure of a support. Public opinion, and the interests of his master, protect him from cruel and abusive treatment. He is not free, but that is a blessing only in name, to a large majority of the human race. Man must be civilized, his mind enlightened, and his feelings refined, before he is fitted for the enjoyment of liberty. The Hindoo and the Tartar are free; but what avails the fruitless boon? Even the states of South America,

the objects of so much sympathy and hope, have profitted but little by their independence. The fierce and exterminating conflicts that mark that sanguinary arena of ambition, and for the termination of which we have looked so long in vain, evince too plainly, that liberty came before they were prepared for it. The greater part of mankind must, in the nature of things, be poor and ignorant, toiling anxiously for their daily bread. All cannot be raised to the top of the scale; and the negro, of all others, is the least susceptible of elevation. You may declare him free—you may enact laws to make him free—but unless you can reverse his doom of inferiority—unless you can exempt him from poverty and toil, your utmost efforts will only change him from a slave into a serf. He would not thank you for the favour—for the only charm he could discover in liberty, would be the privilege of not labouring. You may establish him on the coast of Africa, but it will neither promote his own happiness nor be the means of civilizing that continent. I know there are those who think otherwise. For their motives and opinions, I have much respect; and as long as they pursue the objects they have avowed, according to the rules they have announced, I wish them, with all my heart, success. It is far from my wishes to discourage so grand and munificent a design as that of the American Colonization Society. But when required to act on the faith of their experiment, I must confess my incredulity. The fate of the colony at Sierra Leone, admonishes me of the hazards and difficulties of the enterprise. It is now more than forty years since an association was formed in England, for the purpose of restoring recaptured slaves to their country, and thus introducing christianity into Africa. It was composed of the most intelligent and virtuous men in Great Britain, and its resources were as extensive as any that Virginia could command. Sierra Leone was selected as the theatre of operations, and the experiment has now been in progress for near half a century. During a considerable part of this time, the colony has been upheld and sustained by the strong arm of the British government—defended by her navy, and nourished liberally with her blood and treasure. It is estimated that more than sixteen millions of pounds sterling have been expended in the undertaking. And what is the result? A population of 16,000 souls—the slave trade prosecuted as vigorously as ever—the naked, degraded and idolatrous Krooman hovering still on the confines of the settlement—the thick gloom of heathen darkness not yet penetrated by the holy light of christianity—a feeble spark of civilization glimmering on the border of an immense conti-

ment. Sir, there never was a period at which the sun of civilization shone at once over the whole world. Barbarism passes like a cloud over the earth. It is now settled, in its deepest gloom, on Africa. It will be swept away when, in the accomplishment of the inscrutable purposes of Providence, it becomes fit that it should envelope some other land—perhaps our own. Let the ardour of our zeal be moderated by the reflection that our utmost efforts may hasten it on its round, but cannot chase it away from earth.

Much of the odium with which slavery is viewed by those who are ignorant of its character in Virginia, is owing to their confounding it, in imagination, with all the atrocities of the slave trade. We have all wept at the fate of the African—torn from his country, severed from his kindred, and doomed to pine, in hopeless bondage, far from the objects of all his affections. These were the enormities that prompted the splendid eloquence of Fox, that stimulated the efforts of Sharp, and Wilberforce, and Clarkson; and which have aroused the sympathies of every generous bosom in christendom. But is there any resemblance between such horrors and the circumstances that surround our slaves? This is their home—their birthplace—the only country they ever knew—the spot which habit, if not affection, has rendered dear to them. That they are happy, is evident from the rapid increase of their numbers. In the West Indies, owing, no doubt, to severity of usage, they are constantly diminishing. Let them remain here, then. They are happier than they would be in any other situation. They are happier than their fathers were, and might be happier still if incendiary fanatics would let them alone, and cease to persuade them that they are miserable. Their condition might then be greatly meliorated, and their mental instruction would no longer be incompatible with the peace of society: officious and fruitless interference may do much harm, but cannot do good. The genuine philanthropist should cease to intermeddle, when it is obvious that he only injures the object he seeks to benefit.

But, it is urged with vehemence, that our interests require the removal of slavery. I confess, sir, if there be any consideration which calls for it, this to my mind, carries with it the most weight. And yet it is certain, that whatever evils may flow from slavery, it would now be a far greater evil to abolish it. The sombre pictures which have been drawn of the deplorable condition of the commonwealth, are in a great measure, imaginary—and so far as they are true, the causes have been mistaken. We have been told that agriculture is languishing from the thriftless and unproductive character of slave labour. I cannot speak in detail of the operations

of agriculture, but I can refer you to interesting results as exhibited by the tabular records of our exports. The population of the states north of Mason and Dixon's line, is 5,567,693 souls. The population of the states south of that line, is 7,288,714, souls. During the year 1829, the domestic exports north of this line, amounted in value to \$34,961,907, and the like exports south of it, amounted to \$37,396,764. From which it appears that the products of the respective divisions were about in the ratio of their population. Again, the population of the United States is 12,856,154 souls. The population of Virginia, Georgia, Alabama, North and South Carolina—which are the chief slave holding states, is 3,356,910 souls, or about one fourth of the whole. The domestic exports of the United States in 1827, amounted in value to \$58,921,691. The domestic products exported from the five states above mentioned during the same period amounted to \$18,874,953, or about one third of the exports of the union—with a population of one fourth, their products were equal to one third. Again, the population of Pennsylvania is 1,347,673 souls—that of Virginia is 1,211,272 souls. The domestic products exported from the former in 1827, amounted to \$3,391,296, while those from the latter amounted to \$4,646,737. What do these results prove but that the production of the slave states is greater, in proportion to population, than that of the non-slave-holding states? And such is doubtless the fact. The people of this state, white and black, labor as advantageously, and produce as much, as any equal number of whites, elsewhere. Why then is Virginia poor, and in debt? Not, sir, because she has nothing for market, but because she is defrauded in the sale of her produce and the purchase of her supplies from abroad. The course which commerce has taken, from causes which it is unnecessary here to examine, is disastrous, in the extreme, to Virginia, as well as the other southern states. During the year 1829, the importations to the north of Mason and Dixon's line amounted to \$60,001,961, while those to the south of it were only \$14,480,566—and yet the products exported from the latter division during the same period, as already stated, exceeded those from the former, by nearly three millions of dollars. Here lies the secret of all our misfortunes. The northern states import all the goods, and we of the south buy our supplies from them. They act both as merchants and carriers, and in that combined character, engross the whole commercial profit. It is this annual tribute to the north, superadded to enormous duties on imports, that keeps the south poor; and it is this same tribute which makes the north rich, and builds up those splendid mansions and cities of which we have heard so much in this debate.

Again, it is said that slavery retards the increase of white population, and for proof of the position we are referred to the comparatively rapid growth of the western states, which is ascribed to the non-existence of slavery in them. But it must be manifest to the most casual observer, that this circumstance is owing to totally different causes. The tide of emigration is flowing in one unbroken current to the west. The quantity of public lands thrown into market; the cheapness and fertility of the soil; the ease with which a subsistence may be there obtained, are objects which have attracted immense crowds from every direction. The drain has been chiefly supplied by the Atlantic states, and it is perfectly intelligible that they should remain stationary while the west is rapidly doubling its numbers. If, therefore, the white population of Virginia during the last ten years has increased only fifteen per cent., while that of some of the western states has been nearly two hundred per cent., can it with truth be attributed to the influence of slavery? The only fair criterion is a comparison between the slave holding and non-slave holding states, similarly situated, on the seaboard, and which may be presumed to have contributed alike to the peopling of the west. How will Virginia stand this test? The average increase of population in the United States; during the last ten years, is about thirty-two per cent. Of all the old thirteen states, only two, (Georgia and New York,) are above the average. There is but a slight difference between the southern and the New England states. The ratio of increase of whites in Virginia, is fifteen per cent.; in Delaware it is less than six per cent.; in New Jersey fifteen; in Massachusetts sixteen, and in the far-famed Connecticut, only eight per cent.! Can there be a remaining suspicion, that slavery has caused emigration from Virginia, or in any manner checked her population?

Even if it were desirable under any circumstances, to get rid of our slaves, this, of all others, is the least favorable period. It is admitted that every thing is hurrying to the west, so that it is scarcely possible to retain a poor man here in the east; and yet, at this very conjuncture, we are urged to commence the deportation of the whole laboring force of the country. - Why, even if you would pay us amply for these slaves, and we could come into market, with a full purse, to hire white laborers, it would be utterly impossible to obtain them. No, sir, we must wait until this mighty volume of population shall have rolled on to the base of the rocky mountains, and filled up the whole intermediate valley. When its reflux surges begin to be felt again in the east, and population becomes redundant, then, if ever, but not before, this work may commence. The greater density of population may, perhaps,

compel us to abandon planting, in order to raise the staff of life, and then from a mere calculation of interest, it may be deemed expedient to part with our slaves.

Let us view the subject in what light we choose, there is no cause to complain of the internal economy and condition of Virginia. True, sir, we have had vivid sketches of the beauties of the north—their farms, their mansions, and their splendid cities. We have had glowing descriptions too, of the magic change that has been wrought on the face of the western world: and then we have listened to the woful tale of Virginia's decayed and ruined fortunes. But, sir, the contrast awakens in my breast, neither despair, nor discontent. I admire the thrifty genius of the north, and am proud of the rising greatness of the west. But I envy neither—nor do I love or respect my native state the less, because it is materially different from both. Her fields perhaps are not so green—nor her forests so stately—nor her form so smooth and neat. Her soil, too, may sometimes be clad with pines, and her hills marked deeply, with the track of the torrent. But still she has great and peculiar advantages. In the essential particulars of population and production, she is keeping pace with nearly all of the old thirteen states. Let us cease to complain that she does not outstrip them. Her power and resources are sufficiently ample to gratify all my national ambition. There is enough in her political character—in the honors of the past—in the genius and virtues of her living sons—to satisfy all my national vanity.

But we are warned that however happy our condition may be, we can no longer enjoy it in safety. The slave population is gaining rapidly on the white. We are already in danger, and are hourly becoming more so. In controverting this proposition, I must beg to be excused for offering a few more statistical views. I am by no means satisfied with those which have been exhibited. It is notorious that the free negroes in Virginia, increase with twice the rapidity of any other description of persons. Great misapprehension has been caused by blending slaves with free negroes—calling them the “colored population”—ascertaining the ratio of their combined increase, (which is greater than that of slaves singly) and then using the result as an evidence that *slaves* are gaining on the whites. I discard the free negroes from my estimates. The only subject of inquiry at present is, as to the ratio of increase of *slaves*. The number of whites in Virginia, in 1820, was 603,008, and the number of slaves 425,153. The increase of the former from 1820 to 1830, was 91,430, or fifteen per cent., while the increase of the latter, was 44,571, or only ten per cent. The present excess of whites over slaves, is 224,714. But there

are some who insist that the east derives no security from a population west of the mountains. What then, is the state of things east of the Blue Ridge? The number of whites, in 1790, was 314,523, and the number of slaves 277,449. In 1830, the number of whites, in the same district, was 375,935, and that of slaves 416,259—exhibiting a gain of the latter on the former, during forty years, of 77,398. But when did this gain take place? Between 1800 and 1810, the rate of increase of whites, was only seven-tenths of one per cent., while that of slaves was eleven per cent. From 1810 to 1820, the ratio of increase of whites, was three per cent., and that of slaves, was six per cent. From 1820 to 1830, the ratio of increase of whites, was near eight per cent., and that of the slaves not quite nine per cent. It is evident, that the gain of 77,398, was chiefly effected between 1800 and 1810, or anterior thereto. The important fact to which I wish to direct your attention, is, that although the number of slaves has gained on that of the whites since 1790, yet that the ratio of that gain has been rapidly diminishing for the last twenty years, and is now almost extinguished. At one time, it was as eleven to one—it is now as nine to eight. It is said, however, that we have heretofore had an outlet for a considerable portion of our slaves in the southern states—that they are now about to close their doors, and of course that drain must cease. According to my estimate, founded on an inspection of tables of population and such other *data* as I could procure, there are about 20,000 slaves born annually in this state; there are 10,000 deaths—the census exhibits an increase of nearly 5,000, and consequently, about 5,000 must, annually, be carried to the south. Can any one doubt that there will always be a demand for that number? Those states, from a fear that vicious and disaffected slaves would be palmed upon them, have passed laws to prohibit their admission. They have passed such laws before, and repealed them. They will repeal them again. They will be evaded even whilst in force. They are planters, and must have a regular supply of laborers. The planting interest in the West Indies and elsewhere, opens a market, it is said for 100,000 Africans, annually.

Another fallacious method has been adopted of deducing appalling results. It is assumed, that the present number of slaves in the state (469,724) will be doubled in a certain number of years; and within a certain period thereafter, it will be doubled again—and so on *ad infinitum*; until at no distant period we are to have millions on millions. It is a well known fact in the economy of population, that after it attains a certain bulk, the rate of increase gradually lessens and finally ceases. The present population of the whole earth is proba-

bly no greater than it was a thousand years ago. But this system of doubling is quite harmless if the whites be allowed to double also. Indeed, it presents a cheering aspect. The excess of the whites over the slaves, in 1790, was 149,490. It is now 224,714, and when the whites and slaves shall both have doubled again, the difference in favor of the former will be upwards of 448,000. Is there not safety in this difference? The number of slaves in South Carolina, and also in Louisiana, has, for a long time, greatly exceeded that of the whites. In many of the West India islands, the proportion has been more than five to one; yet we have heard of no rebellions or insurrections except in the case of St. Domingo. That was owing to peculiar causes. It is now a matter of history, that it was occasioned by the discussions and doctrines of the national assembly of France. Liberty and equality were decreed to all nations, and even the West India slave had his post in the miserable pageant of Anacharsis Cloots. All this was communicated, *by the free negroes*, to the slaves, who were thus excited to the perpetration of that horrible massacre. Let gentlemen remember the causes of this catastrophe, and consider how far it is proper here to indulge in the discussion of abstract principles.

The tragedy of Southampton, is held up to our view as an argument that admits of no refutation, and is sufficient to outweigh any conclusions to which our minds might be brought by reason and reflection. It was indeed an appalling occurrence—not from its importance or consequences—but from the deep-toned atrocity that characterized it. Yet, it has happened only once, in the course of near sixty years, which have elapsed since we became an independent people. And is this solitary calamity—so brief and rare—to change the whole tenor of our lives and uplift the very foundations of society? To allow a single disaster to outweigh the long security of years, would be as absurd as to deduce the principles of philosophy from the eccentricities of nature, instead of her customary habits. All that human wisdom can do is to calculate the chances of evil, and abide by that which is comparatively remote. Vesuvius labors, perhaps, once in a century, and cities are buried under its burning lava. Yet the peasant who dwells at its foot feels a comfortable sense of security, and plants his vines on the soil which has gathered over the ruins of Pompeii, with as fair a promise of their fruits as if he dwelt in the broadest plain in Italy. Whither shall we go to escape all dangers? They beset our paths on every side; and while we shun them in one form, they are sure to meet us in another. Throughout the world, there is not a spot where life is more secure than in Virginia; and of all the busy

agents of death, not one has disturbed society so little as insurrection. Yet, gentlemen will have it that we are surrounded with perils, and have arrayed them before us in forms so terrible, that the gloomy genius of Salvator Rosa could have added nothing to the picture. They have talked to us of "passing the Rubicon" and "wading in blood;" and warned us that "the elements are in motion" and "a crisis is at hand." When these and other prophetic bodings fell upon my ear, in all the melancholy madness of eloquence, I could scarcely persuade myself that some great and impending ruin was not about to burst over our heads. I almost fancied that I heard the war-cry and the clash of arms; that the Gauls were mounting the Capitoline hill; that I stood, again, in the House of Burgesses, and heard that lofty old Roman, Patrick Henry, proclaiming to his astounded audience, that war was inevitable; that the enemy were already forging their chains, and an appeal to arms and the God of hosts was all that was left. But, sir, listen not to the deceptive voice of eloquence. It is the orator's art to raise the storm, to invoke the thunder, and impress its terrors on our bewildered senses. Trust him not; for there is no "crisis." When "the elements are in motion"—when Olympus does tremble and the bolt is hurled from the red-right arm of Jove, let us summon all the energies of our nature to meet the occasion as it deserves. But, sir, there is no danger; there will be none, unless our own indiscretion produce it. I beseech you, sir, to pause and reflect before you embark in this perilous enterprise. Without the steady and faithful support of public opinion, through a long series of years, no law you may pass, can be effectual. Have you any assurance of such support? So far from it, I solemnly warn you that whatever act of emancipation you may pass will be received with general reprobation. And if you pass an act that violates the right of property in slaves, it will be met with the sharp, quick remedy of resistance; it will shake this ancient commonwealth to its centre; it will sever it in twain. Then, in truth, the Rubicon will have been passed, and we cannot pause until we fall at the base of Pompey's statue. Then, indeed, if the "genius of emancipation," be a fiend and delight in ruin, she well may smile that "the work goes bravely on."

I will not detain you longer, sir. In expressing my opinions on this subject, I have endeavored to divest myself of every feeling that might disturb the exercise of my reason, and to address myself solely to the understanding, and not the passions of this body. In doing so, I have gone, perhaps, too far into details, and am fearful of having fatigued your attention. But I shall not regret it, if I have succeeded in persuading a

single friend of abolition to pause and reflect before he advances further. I took part in this discussion with no expectation of winning laurels. That is reserved for those who advocate emancipation. They claim already the merit of intrepidity; and if they succeed in their object, they will be crowned, it is said, with immortal honors. I, on the contrary, and those who think with me, must submit to the charge of being too timid to keep pace with "the spirit of the age." There is only one event that can redound to our credit—and I trust in Heaven that may never happen. If our warning voice be disregarded, and the attempt be made and fail amidst the execrations of a ruined people, then, indeed, we may prefer some claim to prudence and discernment. It may be too, that I have mistaken the wishes and interests of my constituents. I was elected before this subject had attracted attention, and they have had no opportunity of making their opinions known to me. I have obeyed the honest dictates of my judgment, and acted in conformity to my own clear conviction of the true interests of the people I represent, and of society generally. If the course I have taken involves any sacrifice of a personal nature, I make it freely on the altar of my country.

